2003 Iowa Crop Summary

As the crop year began in early April, snow on the ground delayed fieldwork but was beneficial to both topsoil and subsoil moisture conditions. The majority of range and pasture land was reported to be of fair condition or better and continued to improve throughout the month. Rain in the middle of the month delayed corn planting, oat seeding, and the application of fertilizers. By the end of April, 93 percent of all oats were planted, 12 percentage points above the norm. Fifty percent of oats were reported to be emerged.

As soil moisture improved, gains in fieldwork were seen in early May. By mid-May, much of Iowa was in need of warm and sunny weather for fields to dry out. The third week in May allowed farmers to nearly complete corn planting as well as almost half of the soybeans. Stress was seen on both corn and soybeans, due to cold temperatures and heavy rain. The majority of oats were considered to be in good condition with 98 percent of oats emerged.

As June began, temperatures rose. Corn replanting occurred because of ponds in fields and soil crusting seen throughout Iowa. As the first week of June came to an end, the first cutting of hay progressed to over half complete while scattered showers delayed the baling of hay. By mid-June, virtually all the corn had emerged and vigorous crop growth was seen after a large rain near the end of the month. Overall, hay, corn, oat, and soybean conditions were reported to be favorable.

July began with heat, humidity, and widely scattered rain. Northern Iowa was hit by storms in early July, resulting in reports of leaning corn, lodged oats, and hail while Southern Iowa was in need of rain. By mid-July, the soybean crop was behind both last year's progress and the norm in both the blooming and setting stages. Corn, too, was behind normal development stages. However, tall corn and short beans were seen through most of Iowa as conditions looked promising.

Dry weather prevailed in August as soil moisture conditions became a concern for Iowa farmers. Dry weather caused stress on crops particularly in Eastern Iowa. By the third week of August, soybeans had dropped leaves prematurely and the dry weather hastened corn maturity. Harvesting of corn for silage was reported to be two to three weeks ahead of normal. Pasture conditions deteriorated by the middle of the month with 52 percent of conditions being reported as poor and very poor.

As September approached, winter hay and silage were being used to feed livestock due to unfavorable conditions of pastures. In mid-September, much needed rain hit most of Iowa. Soybean harvest began in the third week with the condition of the majority of soybeans rated as poor or fair. As September came to an end, 91 percent of corn was reported to be mature but corn harvest was delayed due to wet corn and cool temperatures.

Early October brought a hard frost to all of Iowa. Dry conditions were a concern as rainfall was below average for five weeks. Corn and soybeans continued to be harvested throughout the month. By mid-October, 84 percent of soybeans were harvested, more than 25 percentage points ahead of last year. As the month neared the end, 78 percent of corn was harvested, slightly above the norm and 20 percentage points above last year's average.

As November began, the 2003 harvest was coming to a close. Harvest and fall fieldwork progressed smoothly and ahead of normal. Temperatures were 5-12 degrees below normal as the month began while a hard rain caused delays in corn harvest completion. By the end of the month, farmers still reported that more rain was needed to replenish the subsoil.

The lack of rain in July and September was felt statewide. Corn yields fell six bushels per acre from 163 in 2002 to 157, while soybeans fell 16 bushels per acre from 48 in 2002 to 32.